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audition

equipment review

Monitor Audio Bronze BR5 Floorstanding Loudspeakers

For a reviewer it's always interesting revisiting a product or brand after several years of absence. That's precisely the case for me and Monitor Audio; a brand that I knew well back in its native England. I also had the pleasure to know the man behind Monitor Audio, Mr. Mo Iqbal and his unrelenting passion for metal coned drivers. At least some things remain the same.

One of his more famous of the Monitor Audio models that I knew intimately were the Studio 20s - a absolute 'pig' of a speaker to drive, but ruthlessly revealing and analytical. For

years this speaker was the 'reference' choice of the UK's *What Hi-Fi?* magazine and it was on these that I used to test many a piece of hi-fi electronics.

Times change and like the vast majority of British speaker brands, so too has Monitor Audio. Over the years its product range and speaker line-up has grown considerably and in 2007 it includes custom in-wall and in-ceiling, all-weather, subwoofers plus four key ranges of standmount and floorstanding loudspeakers for both stereo and home theatre use. Prices range to suit all budgets and models range to suit all sorts of applications. A quick check on the website and I counted some 50-odd individual models. That's quite a collection.

I've always associated Monitor Audio with 2-channel music and that's what we have here - a pair of its new Bronze R Series, the floorstanding BR5. Like all Monitor Audio speakers, the Bronze R Series combines metal coned drivers with a metal dome tweeter, which has long been MA's trademark. History tells us that Monitor Audio's first metal domed tweeter was made of a combination of aluminium and magnesium and it sounded far smoother than the single-metal tweeters of its day. Since its inception in 1972, Monitor Audio's stuck to its metallic guns and it's fair to say that the brand is one of, if not the foremost global advocate of metal dome loudspeaker technology.

Monitor Audio loudspeakers revisited with models for all budgets

By Nic Tatham

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

165 x 850 x 247mm

Weight:

11.5kg (each)

Price:

\$1,100 per pair

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So why use metal in speaker cones and domes? Well, it can get decidedly technical the answer, but to keep things simple, there are several advantages. The most obvious is metal's stiffness compared to paper, fabric and plastic materials. This rigidity as well as lower mass makes for a better piston, plus being lighter and stiffer, metal cones tend to be faster too, resulting in a driver that'll better handle and deliver music's transients. It's stronger too, making it longer-lasting and far less likely to degrade over time. These benefits apply mainly to metal cones, whereas metal domes (i.e. tweeters) have their own set of advantages including lightness and stiffness, but also in extending the response in the high frequencies.

But getting the metal materials and their implementation right is the key and it's these that are the hard parts of metal driver design. I've long been a fan and my Ambience Reference 1600s use the ultimate metallic high frequency device - the metallic ribbon tweeter, but this is an expensive solution and not suitable for every loudspeaker enclosure.

The BR5s are the smallest floorstanding Bronze R model and don't take up much space. They have a small footprint and the slim cabinets stand well shy of a metre at 85cm. They're the sort of size that'll fill a small to medium-sized room - any larger and there are the bigger BR6s which will fill a larger space. The rest of the new Bronze range comprises two standmounters, a centre channel, a pair of dual-mode surrounds and an active subwoofer. All are attractively priced and a pair of BR5s will set you back \$1,100.

Which, to be frank, isn't a lot for a floorstander such as this, as long as it can deliver the goods.

As I remembered with Monitor Audios of old, they like running in and the metal cones prefer a warm environment. In the depths of an English winter, the Studio 20s sounded noticeably better once the central heating had warmed up the room, as well as the metal drivers. Here in Australia it's not such an issue, but straight out of the box I could tell the twin 5 1/4-inch (130mm) MMP (Metal Matrix Polymer) drivers needed to move a while before they'd open right up. From cold the bass sounds stunted and loose, but I knew this wouldn't be the case for long. The upper mid and top-end was sounding as sweet as nut though, so the BR5s

promised to be quite an interesting listen.

I gave them over a week, using a Granite Audio burn-in CD as well as normal music and boy, was the wait worth it. Just how far Monitor Audio has come and the quality of these inexpensive BRs came as something of a shock. I know over the years speaker performance has been on the up, while prices have gone the other way, but wasn't expecting the BR5s to be as accomplished as they are. I honestly can not think of another floorstander with these specs and price tag that'll offer as much music and enjoyment than these Monitor Audios. It's a big call, but believe me, I've heard plenty of speakers around a grand and these are way, way up there.

So what's so special? Well, they simply do everything right and without fuss. The bass opens right up and goes right down after run-in. The twin bass/mid drivers may be small and the slim cabinets don't point at real bass extension, but the BR5s deliver depth that's rare from this sort of configuration. For cabinets of this relatively small size the BR5s are capable of creating plenty of the low stuff. But don't think these are simply boom-boxes - far from it, they are a lot more

Technotalk

- Product Type:**
Floorstanding loudspeakers
- Driver Complement:**
1 x 130mm MMP II bass driver
1 x 130mm MMP II mid driver
1 x 25mm Gold dome tweeter
- Cabinet Configuration:**
Dual chamber, bass reflex, twin front and rear ported with removable bungs
- Frequency Response:**
36-30kHz
- Power Handling:**
30-120 watts RMS
- Nominal Impedance:**
6 ohms
- Cable Connection:**
Biwireable 4mm binding posts
- Sensitivity:**
90dB
- Finishes:**
Black, Oak, Walnut, Cherry

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

“I know over the years speaker performance has been on the up, while prices have gone the other way, but wasn't expecting the BR5s to be as accomplished as they are. I honestly can not think of another floorstander with these specs and price tag that'll offer as much music and enjoyment than these Monitor Audios.”

sophisticated. While they'll happily punch out big dance tunes with plenty of thunder, the bass is controlled, tight and precise. And when it comes to underpinning a large scale orchestra, these Monitor Audios exhibit a rare talent. Rather than actually hear the bass component, you're fully aware of it and are able to enjoy the performance as a whole. These loudspeakers let the music do the talking, which is a singular quality at this sort of price.

Try as I might, I couldn't find any piece of music that didn't suit the BR5s. The old saying 'you only get out what you put in' is true and poorly recorded pop CDs sound just that - poor, but this is simply the speakers doing their job. Conversely an audiophile recording of some female vocals shows what their really capable of - creating a soundstage that fills the space between the speakers and also extends beyond the cabinets, thanks largely to an excellent midband and higher frequency performance. Vocals sound tremendously natural and unforced and all the elements are there; soundstaging that lets you hear the placing of instruments and musicians, excellent imagery and timing and a confident tonal quality that only metal cones and domes can deliver.

So, they sound great, but how system-friendly are they? They'll make chums with a wide variety of amplifiers with a 90dB sensitivity and 6 ohm nominal impedance and power handling between 30 and 120 watts. Designed in the UK and built in China, the quality of fit and finish is excellent, especially the attention to detail, such as the embossing around the driver surrounds and bass reflex ports. If I'm going to criticise them at all, all I can think of is that they're physically a bit on the light side; a heavier cabinet tends to inspire more confidence, but it's certainly not a problem.

After a long absence, I've been more than impressed by my reacquaintance with Monitor Audio. I'd go so far as to say this is one of the best hi-fi bargains out there at the moment and they are mandatory listening for anyone considering a pair of speakers between one and two thousand dollars. **RVL**

Ancillary Equipment: Shanling SCD-T200 CD player, Cayin A-88T integrated valve amplifier, ME 24/550II pre/power amplifiers, QED Silver Anniversary Biwire speaker cables, Audioquest Colorado interconnects, SAP Relaxa 1 isolation platform



Metal's the key to Monitor Audio's sonic success and twin metal coned drivers combine with a gold metal dome tweeter in the BR5s.

O p i n i o n

The 'Opinion' expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

“The upper mid and top end was sounding as sweet as nut though, so the BR5s promised to be quite an interesting listen.”

- Performance ★★★★★
- Build Quality ★★★★★
- Compatibility ★★★★★
- Value For Money ★★★★★